

Remarks by Donald C. Winter  
Secretary of the Navy  
USS AMERICA Veterans Association Reunion Dinner  
Crown Plaza Hotel  
Jacksonville, FL  
Friday, June 27, 2008

General and Mrs. Pace, Mr. Walter Waite, Miss Kirsten Haglund, AMERICA veterans, ladies and gentlemen, I am delighted to be here today among so many veterans.

In my experience, former crewmembers of a ship tend to be a very spirited bunch, devoted to their ship and passionate in their support of the Navy.

However, I must say, I have never met a more enthusiastic group than USS AMERICA veterans.

It is clear that your lifelong devotion to your ship and what it represents is deeply felt, and comes from the heart.

To serve in a ship named after our country adds to the pride one feels in being part of the Navy, and adds to the feeling that when AMERICA pulls into port, there is no more powerful symbol of the strength, the ideals, and the greatness of the United States of America.

Those who have served in USS AMERICA feel this intensely, and they have left behind a great legacy.

Entering service in 1965, at the height of the Cold War, USS AMERICA began a career spanning three decades that included participation at the center of some of the most important events of the period.

The American people, watching at home, learned on the evening news about many of them—through the crisis of 1967 in the Middle East, through three deployments to Vietnam, and through the difficult, tense days off the coast of Lebanon during the early 1980's.

AMERICA returned to the center of events in 1986, performing freedom of navigation exercises in the Gulf of Sidra, and then starring in Operation El Dorado Canyon in response to Libya's terrorist attack on a nightclub in West Berlin that April.

That operation, assessed by all observers to have been a spectacular feat of mission planning and execution, put AMERICA on the map as an indispensable asset in

moments of crisis.

The entire national security team knew that AMERICA's superbly trained crew could be counted on when the Nation needed it most.

Eight years later, the commander in chief would once again turn to AMERICA to execute combat missions in a moment of crisis.

After heroically accelerating her time in the shipyard for maintenance, AMERICA joined three other aircraft carriers in the Persian Gulf in February 1991, just prior to the launch of Operation Desert Storm.

3008 combat sorties later—including 78 consecutive days at sea—AMERICA left the Gulf and headed home, laden with heroes and honors.

Those who served on her—and those who served alongside her—still remember the scene of that departure for home after the ship's last underway replenishment.

With the ship's choir singing Lee Greenwood's "Proud to Be an American," broadcast on the 1MC, there was not a dry eye to be found on deck.

It was a breakaway song that lifted every heart to the skies.

AMERICA's veterans have much to be proud of, and superb performance will always be associated with that name.

It is with this extraordinary legacy in mind that I would like to take this opportunity to announce the name of what will be one of the crown jewels of our Fleet.

And so today, I am proud to announce that LHA 6, our newest amphibious assault ship, will carry on the proud legacy of her predecessors and be named . . . USS AMERICA.

America today is confronted with unprecedented terrorist threats from global jihadists who openly state their goals of our destruction.

We also live in a world of rising powers in Asia—some with the potential to challenge us both economically and militarily.

We cannot afford to be complacent.

History is replete with examples of nations caught unprepared for the threats that unexpectedly brought war to their shores.

We must not make the same mistake.

We cannot know if nations will evolve along a peaceful path.

We can, however, take notice when nations with growing power and ambitions are rapidly developing their military capabilities—especially at sea.

Given these dangers today, and potential threats tomorrow, we need a Navy and Marine Corps capable of both prosecuting today's war against global jihadists and meeting the challenges that future wars may bring.

LHA-6 will be a superb new addition to the amphibious fleet, showcasing the tremendous synergy and unique capabilities of the Navy-Marine Corps team.

The expeditionary capabilities of the United States—made famous across the Pacific and on D-Day in World War II, and raised to new heights in today's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan—are second to none.

The capabilities that our Navy and Marine Corps bring to the Joint fight differentiate our military from the militaries of other nations, providing us with both powerful deterrence and unmatched forcible entry capability.

Drawing on the lessons learned from combat operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Navy and Marine Corps determined that an amphibious platform with enhanced aviation facilities would best meet our warfighting requirements.

The design for LHA 6 is the result.

It will be a ship worthy of her illustrious namesake, and it will continue America's long tradition of peace through strength—a tradition that dates from our Founding.

Indeed, President George Washington spelled out clearly the policy that should guide the young Nation in a turbulent, dangerous world:

“If we desire to avoid insult, we must be able to repel it; if we desire to secure the peace, one of the most powerful instruments of our rising prosperity, it must be known that we are at all times ready for war.”

The AMERICA is a wise investment in our Nation's security, and it will help us to face the challenges of an uncertain future.

Let us all resolve to carry on our Nation's honored tradition of peace through strength.

With the fighting spirit of USS AMERICA and the rest of our world class Navy

and Marine Corps, America will continue to fulfill her destiny as a beacon of freedom in the world.

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Now I would like to make an additional announcement.

There is a time-honored tradition in the United States Navy of extending an invitation to a distinguished individual to act as a ship's sponsor.

It is the role of the ship's sponsor to perform the ceremonial duty of breaking a bottle of champagne on the hull of the ship, formally christening her for all to see.

The sponsor then becomes part of that ship's history, charged with carrying on the spirit of the ship, whatever her destiny.

The ship's company may change many times over the course of a ship's life, but the sponsor remains the same.

I am pleased to announce that Mrs. Lynne Pace has graciously accepted our invitation to serve as the sponsor of USS AMERICA.

In her many years as a Marine spouse—from the time her husband was a junior officer through his service as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff—and in their continued service after his retirement last year, Lynne Pace has been both a role model and an inspiration to others.

Lynne is universally respected and admired as someone who has devoted a lifetime to supporting our armed forces, and who has been engaged in countless charitable activities for many decades.

Whether serving to support CARE, the USO, Fisher House, mentorship programs, or injured Marines at Bethesda and Walter Reed, Lynne has been an inspiration to all those whose lives she has touched with her grace, humility, and kind heart.

She exemplifies everything that is great about our country, and it would be difficult to imagine anyone who could better carry on the spirit of this ship, than Lynne Pace.

Lynne, thank you for accepting this honor. And now, I invite you, Walter Waite and the Board of Directors to please join on the stage for the unveiling.